

'Green Economy' - New Disguise for Old Tricks?

by Giuliano Battiston via reed - IPS *Wednesday, May 30 2012, 8:33am*

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FLORENCE, May 28, 2012 (IPS) - Though the current global economic and financial crises are undoubtedly devastating much of the world, they present the perfect opportunity for remodeling our economic system, according to participants at the ninth annual Terra Futura (Future Earth) exhibition of 'good practices' in social, economic and environmental sustainability held here from May 25-27.

"What, how, how much and for whom to produce? Those are the questions we urgently need to answer," said Guido Viale, environmental economist and author of several books on ecological issues.

"The crisis offers us a chance to ecologically reconvert the ways we produce and use goods and services, paving the way to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels, to respect biodiversity and to create a safe, low-carbon economic system."

The first step towards a healthier economy and a cleaner environment is "to find cost-effective ways to improve our energy infrastructure and to 'decarbonise' our energy supply," said Monica Frassoni, president of the European Alliance to Save Energy (EU-ASE), which was established at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP16) in December 2010 and includes some of Europe's leading multinational companies, along with a prominent cross-party group of European politicians.

"With no binding commitment to energy efficiency for 2020 and no verifiable energy saving targets for EU members, Europe risks (feeding) its addiction to fossil fuels," Frassoni added.

As important as the need for an institutional framework and compulsory sectorial save-energy targets for key sectors of the European economy is the need for a radical change in lifestyle.

"The changes that are going to last are those rooted in a changed mindset," Karl-Ludwig Schibel, coordinator of the Italian branch of the Covenant of Mayors, explained.

Launched by the European Commission in 2008, after the adoption of the EU Climate and Energy Package, the Covenant of Mayors is a European movement whose aim is to meet and exceed the EU's 20 percent CO2 reduction goal by 2020. "We strongly believe in the effectiveness of a bottom-up process, promoted by citizens, regional authorities and local administrators. It is here that the deepest mindset revolutions are going on," said Schibel.

According to leading environmental activist Vandana Shiva, cultural awareness of our intrinsic and fragile bondage to the "lively earth" is the most important tool to promote justice, sustainability and a new economy.

"It's time to abandon the centralised, fossilised, sclerotic model adopted (throughout) the industrial era and build a new model – a decentralised, democratic, horizontal model, where all ecosystems are respected and in which diversity is a value. It means we should fight the monocultures of the mind boosted by industrialism. It means (being) careful about old tricks hidden by new words, such as the

'green economy'," she added.

Shiva is certainly not alone in her vision for a healthier planetary future. Susan George, chair of the Board of the Transnational Institute, told IPS, "I don't like to use the word 'green economy', as it risks (becoming) a means through which global corporate capitalism makes profits, with a new, more respectable face."

Twenty years after the first Earth Summit, the international community will gather once more in Rio de Janeiro from Jun. 20-22, for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. The Rio+20 conference will discuss the topic of green economy, whose definition of Green remains a matter of controversy.

George added, "Over the past years, I have proposed a Green New Deal, which means taking control over finance and investing in social and green transition. The first step is to socialise, not nationalise, the banks, to include citizens and customers in their management and to lend (money) for small environmental initiatives."

The so-called green economy, on the other hand, is something completely different. "I am pessimistic about Rio," George told IPS. "For the big corporations it is only an excuse to say: 'The U.N. is slow and ineffective, while we are effective and smart; so, give us all the money and we will invest it into the green economy'. But they just want to make new profits. We must ask: a green economy for who, and run by whom?"

Barbara Unmüßig, president of the Heinrich Boll Stiftung, recently wrote in 'The Green Economy: A New Magic Bullet?', "Large sectors of global civil society only see (the green economy) as an extremely profitable business sector."

She said that, in order to truly make a difference, the green economy model should also pay attention to issues of power and equity while shifting global policy emphasis away from free trade and growth.

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